

Caring for the Little Ones

by Karen Miller



Winter Outside Fun with Infants and Toddlers

In the last issue, **Brenda Fischer** of Stevens Point, Wisconsin, asked for hints to get several toddlers dressed to go outside during the winter months. I talked to some *cold weather friends* to get some practical suggestions, as well as ideas for fun things to do outside.

Getting Them Outside

- **Dawn Rouse**, head infant teacher at **New Horizons in Child Development** in Dover, New Hampshire, gets babies ready in pairs, making it a social activity. Make sure to have everything gathered ahead of time, she reminds. Use humor, and *talk* to the children constantly while you are dressing them. Also ask for their cooperation. Even the smallest babies can help you, and they seem to appreciate being included in the process rather than being treated like passive dolls.

- **Kalen Saxton**, who runs a home child care program in Anchorage called **Kalen's Infant Toddler Parent Program**, sees getting ready to go outdoors not as a chore to get through but as an integral part of her curriculum with toddlers and twos. Allow extra time for it in the winter and use it as an opportunity to build self-help skills and vocabulary. Like Dawn, she reminds us to *keep talking*.

She helps children think about the order in which they need to put things on and how to get that hat on so it is comfortable and doesn't cover their eyes. Mirrors are in their cubby area so they can check themselves out. She might lay out all of their outer clothing in a body image shape, with the hat on top, boots at the

bottom, etc. Even younger toddlers can sit in the middle of their snowsuit and get their legs in.

Allow children to do as much as possible for themselves. Manipulating zippers and Velcro fasteners is fine motor practice. Kalen has created paper dolls with a set of winter clothes and talks about what goes on first, etc. (You could also do this on a flannel board.)

- At the **Learning Tree** in Vail, Colorado, they have their outside time after lunch, before nap time. Owner **Mo Mulrooney**, who also teaches toddlers, says the deep breathing and cold air uses up energy and makes children tired so that they nap well. To expedite the process, they put children's snow pants and boots on before lunch. Then all they have to do is slip on jackets, mittens, and hats before they go outside. If you have your outside time after your morning snack, this would work well then, too. Knowing that food is waiting for them motivates children to be cooperative in pulling on their snow pants and boots.

- If you work in a program with more than one adult, let one person go outside with the children who are ready first. This is a motivation to move along, and it also eliminates waiting. Kalen has children who are ready first help the ones who aren't ready instead of standing at the door and yelling, "Hurry up!"

- If staffing flexibility allows, Dawn likes to take infants out two at a time for about 20 minutes. While one staff person is outside, someone inside can be getting two more ready.

Once They're Outside

- Kalen involves the children in getting the yard ready to play. Sometimes they need to wipe off the climber, slide, and toys with towels or shovel off the walk and steps. She also has small brooms and dustpans available for them to use.

- Both Mo and Dawn say children enjoy being pulled around the yard on a large sled.



- This photo of one of Kalen's kids shows that all kinds of sand toys are just as much fun in the snow as in sand. Mo's toddlers like using shovels to fill up dump trucks.

- Mo brings the large plastic blocks out in the snow.

- Kalen keeps a mini-trampoline outside. It does fine and doesn't rust.

- When the sidewalks are clear, Dawn will put toddlers in large buggies that accommodate six children at a time; they enjoy the winter landscape. Winter walks around the neighborhood are just as much fun as any other time of year, Kalen reminds us. Children notice decorations and changes.

- Dawn packs infants into flat-bottomed plastic infant bathtubs, tucking pillows around them, and pulls them around the yard.

- Kalen develops a marvelous path that winds around their back yard. The snow can get very deep in Anchorage, but you can always maintain a path. One year she even built little caves and snow benches at various places in the path.

Do you have more outside ideas for us? Please send a note to the address at the end of the article and we'll share them in future issues.



Good Ideas for Homemade Toys

My test for a great homemade toy idea is that it makes me hit my forehead and say, "Why didn't I think of that???" Vera Sherbon, lab instructor for toddlers and twos at Pioneer Technology Center in Ponca City, Oklahoma, gives us two such ideas:

Raisin Boxes Plus Velcro

Let the children help you stuff small raisin boxes with facial tissues. Tape them shut and cover with self-adhesive paper if you wish. Attach self-stick Velcro strips to the sides of the boxes. Children enjoy sticking them together and pulling them apart again.

Peanut Butter Jar Nesting

Wide-mouthed plastic peanut butter jars of several sizes make an ideal nesting/stacking toy. Toddlers and twos enjoy screwing and unscrewing the lids and fitting the smaller jars inside the larger ones. For added appeal, Vera sometimes puts a small object inside the smallest jar.

Open Discussion

Our September column responded to a question about the effect long days have on infants in care.

Mary Ann Jones of the Samaritan Child Care Center in Troy, New York, writes:

"In the infant room where I work, the staff have agreed to get the 'chores' done (i.e., doing laundry, cleaning equipment and toys, sweeping, etc.) earlier in the day so that the attention of late afternoon staff can be solely on the children. We also encourage one another to save some of our *best, more interesting* activities for that time of the day. Many times by 5 p.m., I find myself quietly lying on the floor, soothing music in the background, with two or three toddlers crawling over me. Thanks for your encouragement!"

Mary Ann said the article also helped to remind the staff to see parents as whole people with whole lives, rather than just "Johnny's mom." "I had just had a young mom come to me sharing her feelings of guilt and shame stemming from staff glares and whispered comments anytime she took a day off from work without her son."

Tara and Susan Federrighi, a mother and daughter team in San Rafael, California, feel that although the information about the stress long days can cause babies is definitely true, sharing this with parents usually only *adds* to the stress and may not be in the best interest of mother or child. They feel that our pieces of advice under "Making the Best of the Situation" and "Caregiver Feelings" are utopian.

"We must educate our society on the growing crises created by the over-extended, loosely bonded, stressed-out family. Emphasis on shorter work weeks and longer vacations is a solution which offers the time that the family must have. Some businesses have become *family friendly*, but we have a long row to hoe. . . . As stress-induced child abuse is on the increase, divorce rates mount, and drugs and violence permeate our country, our society that does not put its children first (second, or third), must change. . . . Our children do deserve to be given a lot more time. But we need to ask for it from those who have it to give. The employers!"

Send comments, questions, feedback, giggles, good ideas, as well as any photos you'd like to share with other readers to:

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*Karen Miller is author of **Ages and Stages, Things to Do with Toddlers and Twos, More Things to Do with Toddlers and Twos, and The Outside Play and Learning Book.***